

275/15
ELFRIDA,

A

Dramatic Poem.

Written on the MODEL of

The Ancient GREEK Tragedy.

By Mr M A S O N.

The FIFTH EDITION, Corrected.

L O N D O N:

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LETTERS

CONCERNING

The following DRAMA.

LETTER I.

I Was aware, when I sent you my Poem, that it would be liable to the very objections you make to it. Yet perhaps, they will be obviated to your satisfaction, when I have laid before you (as indeed I ought to have done at first) the original idea which led me to chuse such a subject, and to execute it in so peculiar a manner.

Had I intended to give an exact copy of the antient Drama, your objections to the present Poem would be unanswerable. But my design was much less confin'd. I meant only to pursue the antient method so far as it is probable a Greek Poet, were he alive, would
now

now do, in order to adapt himself to the genius of our times, and the character of our Tragedy. According to this notion, every thing was to be allowed to the present taste, which nature and Aristotle could possibly dispense with; and nothing of intrigue or refinement was to be admitted, at which antient judgment could reasonably take offence. Good sense, as well as antiquity, prescribed an adherence to the three great Unities; these therefore were strictly observed. But on the other hand, to follow the modern masters in those respects wherein they had not so faultily deviated from their predecessors, a story was chosen, in which the tender, rather than the noble passions were predominant, and in which even love had the principal share. Characters too were drawn as nearly approaching to private ones, as Tragic dignity would permit; and affections rais'd rather from the impulse of common humanity, than the distresses of royalty and the fate of kingdoms. Beside this, for the sake of natural embellishment, and to reconcile mere modern readers to that simplicity of fable, in which I thought it necessary to copy the Antients, I contriv'd to lay the scene in an old romantic forest. For, by this means, I was enabled to enliven the poem by various touches of pastoral description; not affectedly brought in from the store-

store-house of a picturesque imagination, but necessarily resulting from the scenery of the place itself: A beauty, so extremely striking in the *COMUS* of Milton, and the *AS YOU LIKE IT* of Shakespear; and of which the Greek Muse (tho' fond of rural imagery) has afforded few examples, besides that admirable one in the *PHILOCTETES* of Sophocles.

By this idea I could wish you to regulate your criticism. I need not, I think, observe to you that these deviations from the practice of the Antients may be reasonably defended. For we were long since agreed, that, where Love does not degenerate into episodical gallantry, but makes the foundation of the distress, it is, from the universality of its influence, a passion very proper for Tragedy. And I have seen you too much mov'd at the representation of some of our best Tragedies of private story, to believe you will condemn me for making the other deviation.

L E T T E R

L E T T E R II.

I Am glad, you approve the method, I have taken, of softening the rigor of the old Drama. If I have, indeed, softened it sufficiently for the modern taste, without parting with any of the essentials of the Greek method, I have obtain'd my purpose: which was to obviate some of the popular objections made to the antient form of Tragedy. For the current Opinion, you know, is, that by the strict adherence to the Unities, it restrains the genius of the Poet; by the simplicity of its conduct, it diminishes the pathos of the fable; and, by the admission of a continued chorus, prevents that agreeable embarras, which awakens our attention, and interests our passions.

The universal veneration, which we pay to the name of Shakespear, at the same time that it has improv'd our relish for the higher beauties of Poetry, has undoubtedly been the ground-work of all this false criticism. That disregard, which, in compliance merely with the taste of the times, he shew'd of all the necessary rules of the Drama, hath since been consider'd as a characteristic of his vast and original genius; and consequently set up as
a model

a model for succeeding writers. Hence M. Voltaire remarks very justly, “ que le merite
 “ de cet auteur a perdu le Theatre Anglois.
 “ Le tems, qui seul fait la reputation des
 “ hommes, rend à la fin leurs defauts re-
 “ spectables.”

Yet, notwithstanding the absurdity of this low superstition, the notion is so popular amongst Englishmen, that I fear it will never be entirely discredited, 'till a poet rises up amongst us with a genius as elevated and daring as Shakespeare's, and a judgment as sober and chastis'd as Racine's. But as it seems too long to wait for this prodigy, it will not surely be improper for any one of common talents, who would entertain the public without indulging its caprice, to take the best models of antiquity for his guides; and to adapt those models, as near as may be, to the manners and taste of his own times. Unless he do both, he will, in effect, do nothing. For it cannot be doubted, that the many gross faults of our stage, are owing to the complaisance and servility, with which the ordinary run of writers have ever humour'd that illiterate, whimsical, or corrupted age, in which it was their misfortune to be born.

Milton, you will tell me, is a noble exception to this observation. He is so, and would

have been a nobler, had he not run into the contrary extreme. The contempt, in which, perhaps with Justice, he held the age he liv'd in, prevented him from condescending either to amuse or to instruct it. He had, before, given to his unworthy Countrymen the noblest Poem that genius, conducted by antient art could produce; and he had seen them receive it with disregard, if not with dislike. Conscious therefore of his own dignity, and of their demerit, he look'd to posterity only for his reward, and to posterity only directed his future labours. Hence it was perhaps, that he form'd his *SAMPSON AGONISTES* on a model more simple and severe than Athens herself would have demanded; and took *Æschylus* for his master, rather than *Sophocles* or *Euripides*: intending by this conduct to put as great a distance as possible between himself and his contemporary writers; and to make his work (as he himself said) *much different from what amongst them passed for the best.*

The success of the Poem was, accordingly, what one would have expected. The age, it appeared in, treated it with total neglect; neither hath that posterity, to which he appealed, and which has done justice to most of his other writings, as yet given to this excellent piece its full measure of popular and universal fame. Perhaps in your closet, and
that

that of a few more, who unaffectedly admire genuine nature and ancient simplicity, the Agonistes may hold a distinguished rank. Yet, surely, we cannot say (in Hamlet's phrase) "*that it pleases the Million; it is still*" "*Caviar to the general.*"

Hence, I think, I may conclude, that unless one would be content with a very late and very learned posterity, Milton's conduct in this point should not be followed. A Writer of tragedy must certainly adapt himself more to the general taste; because the Dramatic, of all kinds of Poetry, ought to be most universally relish'd and understood. The Lyric Muse addresses herself to the imagination of a reader; the Didactic to his judgment; but the Tragic strikes directly on his passions. Few men have a strength of imagination capable of pursuing the flights of Pindar: Many have not a clearness of apprehension suited to the reasonings of Lucretius and Pope: But every man has passions to be excited; and every man feels them excited by Shakespeare.

But, tho' Tragedy be thus chiefly directed to the heart, it must be observed, that it will seldom attain its end without the concurrent approbation of the judgment. And to procure this, the artificial construction of the fable goes a great way. In France, the ex-

cellence of their several poets is chiefly measur'd by this standard. And amongst our own writers, if you except Shakespeare (who indeed ought, for his other virtues, to be exempt from common rules) you will find, that the most regular of their compositions is generally reckon'd their *Chef d'oeuvre*, witness the *All for Love* of Dryden, the *Venice preserv'd* of Otway, and the *Jane Shore* of Rowe.

LETTER III.

THE scheme, you propos'd in your last, is I own practicable enough. Undoubtedly, most part of the Dialogue of the Chorus might be put into the mouth of an Emma or Matilda, who, with some little shew of sisterly concernment, might be easily made to claim kindred with Earl Athelwold. Nay, by the addition of an unnecessary incident or two, which would cost me no more than they are worth in contriving, and an unmeaning personage or two, who would be as little expence in creating, I believe I could quickly make the whole tolerably fit for an English Audience.

But for all this I cannot perswade myself to enter upon the task. I have, I know not how (like many of my betters) contracted a
kind

kind of veneration for the old Chorus ; and am willing to think it essential to the Tragic Drama. You shall hear the reasons that incline me to this judgment. They respect the *Poet* and the *Audience*.

It is agreed, I think, on all hands, that in the conduct of a fable, the admission of a Chorus lays a necessary restraint on the *Poet*. The two Unities of Time and Place, are esteem'd by some of less consequence in our modern Tragedy, than the third Unity of Action ; but admit a Chorus, and you must, of necessity, restore them to those equal rights, which they antiently enjoyed, and yet claim, by the Charter of Aristotle. For the difference, which the use of the Chorus makes, is this: The modern Drama contents itself with a fact *represented* ; the antient requires it to be *represented before Spectators*. Now as it cannot be suppos'd, that these Spectators should accompany the chief Personages into private apartments, one single Scene or *unity of Place* becomes strictly necessary. And as these Spectators are assembled on purpose to observe and bear a part in the action, the *time* of that action becomes, of course, that of the spectacle or representation itself ; it being unreasonable to make the Spectators attend as long, as the Poet, in bringing about his Catastrophe, may require.

And

And this is usually the practice of the antient Stage. The modern, on the contrary, regards very little these two capital restraints; and its disuse of the Chorus helps greatly to conceal the absurdity. For the Poet, without offending so much against the laws of probability, may lead his personages from one part to another of the same palace or city, when they have only a poultry Servant or insignificant Confidant to attend them. He may think himself at liberty to spend two or three days, months, or even years, in compleating his story; to clear the Stage at the end, or, if he pleases, in the middle of every act: and, being under no controul of the Chorus, he can break the continuity of the Drama, just where he thinks it convenient; and, by the assistance of a brisk fugue and a good violin, can persuade his audience, that as much time has elaps'd as his Hero's, or rather his own distress, may demand.

Hence it is, that secret intrigues become (as Mr Dryden gravely calls them) the *beauties of our modern Stage*. Hence it is, that Incidents, and Bustle, and *Business*, supply the place of Simplicity, Nature, and Pathos: A happy change, perhaps, for the generality of writers, who might otherwise find it impossible to fill *cette longue carriere de*
cinq

cing actes, which a Writer, sufficiently experienced in these matters, says, *est si prodigieusement difficile à remplir sans Episodes*.

But, whatever these Play-makers may have gain'd by rejecting the Chorus, the true Poet has lost considerably by it. For he has lost a graceful and natural resource to the embellishments of Picturesque Description, sublime allegory, and whatever else comes under the denomination of *pure Poetry*. Shakespeare, indeed, had the power of introducing this naturally, and, what is most strange, of joining it with *pure Passion*. But I make no doubt, if we had a Tragedy of his form'd on the Greek model, we should find in it more frequent, if not nobler, instances of his high-Poetical Capacity, than in any single composition he has left us. I think you have a proof of this in those parts of his historical plays, which are call'd Chorus's, and written in the common Dialogue metre. And your imagination will easily conceive, how fine an ode the description of the night preceding the battle of Agincourt, would have made in his hands; and what additional grace it would receive from that form of composition.

With the means of introducing Poetry naturally is lost, also, the opportunity of conveying moral reflections with grace and propriety. But this comes more properly under
confi-

consideration, when I give you my thoughts on the advantage the audience received from a well-conducted Chorus.

L E T T E R IV.

IN my last I took no notice of that superior pomp and majesty, which the Chorus necessarily added to the scene of the Drama. I made no remarks on the agreeable variety it introduc'd into the versification and metre; nor shew'd how by uniting the harmony of the Lyre to the pomp of the Buskin, musick became intimately connected with it, and furnished it with all its additional graces. These and many other advantages I might have insisted upon, had I thought them so material as the two I mentioned; the latter of which, namely its being a proper vehicle for moral and sentiment, is so material, that I think nothing can possibly atone for the loss of it.

In those parts of the Drama, where the judgment of a mixt audience is most liable to be misled by what passes before its view, the chief actors are generally too much agitated by the furious passions, or too much attach'd by the tender ones, to think coolly, and impress on the spectators a moral sentiment properly. A Confidant or Servant has freedom

dom sense enough to do it, never dignity enough to make it regarded. Instead therefore of these, the Antients were provided with a band of distinguish'd persons, not merely capable of seeing and hearing, but of arguing, advising, and reflecting; from the leader of which a moral sentiment never came unnaturally, but suitably and gracefully; and from the troop itself, a poetical flow of tender commiseration, of religious supplication, or of virtuous triumph, was ever ready to heighten the pathos, to inspire a reverential awe of the Deity, and to advance the cause of *honesty* and of truth.

If you ask me, how it augmented the pathetic, I cannot give you a better answer than the *Abbé Vatri* has done in his dissertation on the subject, published in the *Memoirs de l'Acad. des Inscr. &c.* “ It affected this
 “ (says he) both in its *odes* and *dialogue*.
 “ The wonderful power of Music and the
 “ Dance is universally allowed. And, as
 “ these were always *accompagniments* to the
 “ Odes, there is no doubt but they contributed greatly to move the passions. It
 “ was necessary that there should be odes or
 “ intermedes, but it was also necessary, that
 “ these intermedes should not suffer the
 “ minds of the Audience to cool, but, on
 “ the contrary, should support and fortify
 c “ those

“ those passions, which the previous scenes
 “ had already excited. Nothing imaginable
 “ could produce this effect better, than the
 “ choral songs and dances, which fill’d the
 “ mind with ideas corresponding to the sub-
 “ ject, and never fail’d to add new force to
 “ the sentiments of the principal personages.
 “ In the Dialogue also, the Chorus serv’d to
 “ move the passions by shewing to the spec-
 “ tators other spectators strongly affected by
 “ the action. A spectacle of such a kind as
 “ is fitted to excite in us the passions of
 “ *Terror*, and *Pity*, will not of itself so
 “ strongly affect us, as when we see others,
 “ also, affected by it. The painters have
 “ generally understood this secret, and have
 “ had recourse to an expedient, similar to
 “ that of the Chorus of the Poets. Not
 “ content with the simple representation of
 “ an historical event, they have also added
 “ groups of assistant figures, and express in
 “ their faces the different passions, they
 “ would have their picture excite. Nay they
 “ sometimes inlist into their service even ir-
 “ rational animals. In the *slaughter of the*
 “ *Innocents*, Le Brun was not satisfied with
 “ expressing all the horror, of which the
 “ subject is naturally capable, he has also
 “ painted two Horses with their hair stand-
 “ ing on end, and starting back, as afraid
 “ to

“ to trample upon the bleeding infants. This
 “ is an artifice which has often been employed,
 “ and which has always succeeded. A good
 “ poet should do the same ; and Iphigenia
 “ should not be suffered to appear on the
 “ Theatre, without being accompanied with
 “ persons capable of feeling her misfortunes.”

Had this ingenious Abbé seen the famous Bellifarius of Vandyke, I am apt to believe he would have thought it a much more noble illustration of the matter. The Soldier in that piece, tho’ so much condemn’d by our modern Professors of *Vertú* for being, as they say, the principal Figure, is the very thing, which raises this picture from a simple Portrait (which it must otherwise have been) to the finest moral painting ; and in Greece would have plac’d the Painter amongst that class of Artists, which they esteem’d the noblest, the ΗΘΟΓΡΑΦΟΙ. The greatest Tragic Poet could not have rais’d a more exquisite distress, than this judicious Painter has done by the attitude of that Soldier ; as well as by the subordinate figures, which, with great propriety, are female ones ; nothing being so likely to raise in a military mind that mixture of pity and disdain, which he wanted to express, as to see such a hero reliev’d by charity, and that too the charity of girls and old women.

But, returning to my subject, I will just observe to you, that if it be proper to assist an audience in relishing the pathetic, by shewing an imitation of that pathos in the Chorus, it is much more so to instruct them how to be affected properly, with the characters and actions which are represented in the course of the Drama. The character of PIERRE in *Venice preserv'd*, when left entirely to the judgment of the audience, is perhaps one of the most improper for public view, that ever was produced on any stage. It is almost impossible, but some part of the spectators should go from the representation with very false and immoral impressions. But had the Tragedy been written on the ancient plan; had Pierre's character been drawn just as it is, and some few alterations made in Jaffier's, I know no two characters more capable of doing service in a moral view, when justly animadverted upon by the Chorus. I don't say, I would have trusted Otway with the writing of it.

To have done, and to release you. Bad characters become on this plan as harmless in the hands of the Poet, as the Historian; and good ones become infinitely more useful, by how much the Poetic is more forcible, than the Historical mode of instruction.

L E T T E R

L E T T E R V.

THE reason, why in a former Letter you advis'd me to alter the Chorus, is made very apparent in your last. For, by persuading me to get the Odes set to music, and to risk the play on the stage, I understand only that you are willing, any how, to make it a more profitable work for me, than it can possibly be by means of the press alone.

Yet certainly, Sir, one single reflection on our British pit will make you change your sentiments effectually. Think only on the trial made by M. Racine, in a nation much before our's, in a taste for probability and decorum in Theatrical diversions. In his two last Tragedies, you know, he has fully succeeded in the very thing I aim'd at ; and has adapted a noble imitation of ancient simplicity to the taste of his own times : particularly in his *Athalie*, a poem in which the most superb and august spectacle, the most interesting event, and the most sublime flow of inspired Poetry, are all nobly and naturally united. Yet I am told, that neither that, nor the *Esther*, retains its Chorus, when represented on the French Theatre.

To what is this owing ? To the refinement most certainly of our modern music. This
art

art is now carried to a pitch of perfection, or, if you will, of corruption, which makes it utterly incapable of being an adjunct to Poetry.

Il y a grand apparence, que les progrès que vous avez faits dans la musique, ont nui enfin à ceux de la véritable Tragedie. C'est un talent, qui a fait tort à un autre ; says M. Voltaire with his usual taste and judgment. Our different cadences, our divisions, variations, repetitions, without which modern music cannot subsist, are intirely improper for the expression of poetry, and were scarce known to the Ancients.

But could this be manag'd, the additional expence necessarily attendant on such a performance, would make the matter impracticable. This Mr Dryden foresaw long ago. The passage is curious.

“ A new Theatre, much more ample and
 “ much deeper, must be made for that purpose ; besides the cost of sometimes forty
 “ or fifty habits : which is an expence too
 “ large to be supply'd by a company of actors.
 “ 'Tis true I should not be sorry to see a *Chorus*
 “ on a Theatre, more than as large and as deep
 “ again as our's, built and adorn'd at a King's
 “ charges ; and on that condition, and another, which is, that my hands were not
 “ bound behind me, as now they are, I should
 “ not despair of making such a *Tragedy* as
 “ might be both *instructive* and *delightful* ac-
 “ cording

“ cording to the *manner* of the Grecians.”
 What he means by having *his hands bound*, I
 imagine, is, that he was either engag’d to his
 subscribers for a Translation of Virgil, or to
 the manager of the Theatre for so many plays
 a season. This suffrage of Mr Dryden is,
 however, very apposite to the present point.
 It serves, also, to vindicate my design of
 imitating the Greek Drama. For if he, who
 was so prejudiced to the modern stage, as to
 think intrigue a capital beauty in it; if he, I
 say, owns that the grand secret *prodesse et delectare*
 was the characteristic of the Greek Drama
 only, nothing, I think, can better justify my
 present attempt than the approbation he gives
 to it in this passage.

Having now settled with you all matters of
 general criticism, I hope in your next you will
 give me your objections to *scenes, speeches,*
images, &c. And be assur’d I shall treat your
 judgment in these matters with greater defe-
 rence, than I have done in what related to
 the Stage and the Chorus.

Pemb. Hall, 1751.

Persons of the DRAMA.

ORGAR, Earl of Devonshire.

CHORUS, of British Virgins.

ELFRIDA, Daughter to ORGAR.

ATHELWOLD, Husband to ELFRIDA.

EDWIN, a Messenger.

EDGAR, King of England.

ORGAR disguis'd in a Peasant's Habit
speaks the Prologue.

SCENE, a Lawn before ATHELWOLD'S
Castle in *Harewood Forest*.

ELFRIDA,

A

Dramatic Poem.

O R G A R.

HOW nobly does this venerable wood,
 Gilt with the glories of the orient sun,
 Embofom yon fair mansion! The soft air
 Salutes me with most cool and temp'rate breath;
 And, as I tread, the flow'r-besprinkled lawn
 Sends up a gale of fragrance. I should guess,
 If e'er Content deign'd visit mortal clime,
 This was her place of dearest residence.
 Grant Heav'n! I find it such. 'Tis now three months,
 Since first Earl Athelwold espous'd my daughter.
 He then besought me, for some little space
 The nuptials might be secret; many reasons,
 He said, induc'd to this: I made no pause,
 But, resting on his prudence, to his will
 Gave absolute concurrence. Soon as married,

A

He to this secret feat convey'd Elfrida ;
Convey'd her as by stealth, enjoy'd, and left her :
Yet not without I know not what excuse
Of call to court, of Edgar's royal friendship,
And England's welfare. To his prince he went :
And since, as by intelligence I gather,
He oft returns to this his cloyster'd wife ;
But ever with a privacy most studied.
His visits, as they're stol'n, are also short ;
Seldom beyond the circuit of one sun :
Then back to court, while she his absence mourns
Full many a lonely hour. I brook not this.
Had Athelwold espous'd some base-born peasant,
This usage had been apt : but when he took
My daughter to his arms, he took a virgin,
Thro' whose rich veins the blood of British Kings,
Ran in un sullied stream. Her lineage sure
Might give her place and notice with the noblest
In Edgar's court. Elfrida's beauty too
(I speak not from a father's foolish fondness)
Would shine amid the fairest, and reflect
No vulgar glory on that beauty's master.
This act bespeaks the madman. Who, that own'd
An em'rald, jasper, or rich chrysolite,
Would hide its lustre, or not bid it blaze
Conspicuous on his brow ? Haply Athelwold
May have espous'd some other. 'Sdeath he durst not.

ELFRIDA.

3

My former feats in arms must have inform'd him,
That Orgar, while he liv'd, would never prove
A traitor to his honor. If he has—
This aged arm is not so much unstrung
By slack'ning years, but just revenge will brace it.
And, by yon awful heav'n—But hold, my rage.
I came to search into this matter coolly.
Hence, to conceal the father and the earl,
This pilgrim's staff, and scrip, and all these marks
Of vagrant poverty.

CHORUS (within.)

Hail to thy living light, ambrosial Morn!
All hail thy roseate ray!

ORGAR.

But hark, the sound of sweetest minstrelsy
Breaks on my ear. The females, I suppose,
Whom Athelwold has left my child's attendants:
That, when she 'wails the absence of her lord,
Their lenient airs, and sprightly-fancied songs,
May steal away her woes. See, they approach:
I'll wait the cadence of their harmony,
And then address them with some feigned tale.

[He retires.]

ELFRIDA.

CHORUS.

O D E.

Hail to thy living light,
Ambrosial Morn! all hail thy roseat ray:
That bids gay Nature all her charms display
In varied beauty bright;
That bids each dewy-spangled flowret rise,
And dart around its vermeil dies;
Bids silver lustre grace yon sparkling tide,
That winding warbles down the mountain's side.

Away, ye Goblins all,
Wont the bewilder'd traveller to daunt;
Whose vagrant feet have trac'd your secret haunt
Beside some lonely wall,
Or shatter'd ruin of a moss-grown tow'r,
Where, at pale midnight's stillest hour,
Thro' each rough chink the solemn orb of night
Pours momentary gleams of trembling light.

Away, ye Elves, away:
Shrink at ambrosial Morning's living ray;
That living ray, whose pow'r benign
Unfolds the scene of glory to our eye,
Where, thron'd in artless majesty,
The cherub Beauty sits on Nature's rustic shrine.—

CHORUS, ORGAR,

CHORUS.

Silence, my sisters. Whence this rudeness, stranger,
That thus has prompted thine unbidden ear
To listen to our strains?

ORGAR.

Your pardon, Virgins:
I mean not rudeness, tho' I dar'd to listen;
For ah; what ear so fortify'd and barr'd
Against the tuneful force of vocal charms,
But would with transport to such sweet assailants
Surrender its attention? Never yet
Have I past by the night-bird's 'custom'd spray,
What time she pours her wild and artless song,
Without attentive pause and silent rapture;
How could I then, with savage disregard,
Hear voices tun'd by nature sweet as her's,
Grac'd with all art's addition?

CHORUS.

Thy mean garb,
And this thy courtly phrase but ill accord.
Whence, and what art thou, stranger?

ORGAR.

Virgins, know
These limbs have oft been rob'd in fairer vest:

But what avails it now ? all have their fate ;
And mine has been most wretched.

CHORUS.

May we ask

What cruel cause—

ORGAR.

No ! let this hapless breast
Still hide the melancholy tale.

CHORUS.

We know,

There oft is found an avarice in grief ;
And the wan eye of Sorrow loves to gaze
Upon its secret hoard of treasur'd woes
In pining solitude. Perhaps thy mind
Takes the same pensive cast : if not, indulge
The tender temper of our virgin souls,
Which loves to melt in sympathizing tears
And social sighs.

ORGAR.

Ah ! ill would it become ye,
To let the woes of such a wretch as I am,
E'er dim your bright eyes with a pitying tear.

CHORUS.

The eye, that will not weep another's sorrow,
Should boast no gentler brightness than the glare,

That reddens in the eye-ball of the wolf.

Let us entreat—

O R G A R.

Know, Virgins, I was born
To ample property of lands and flocks,
On this side Tweeda's stream. My youth and vigor
Atchiev'd full many a feat of martial prowess :
Nor was my skill in chivalry unnoted
In the fair volume of my sov'reign's love ;
Who ever held me in his best esteem,
And closest to his person. When he paid,
What all must pay, to fate ; and short-liv'd Edwy
Mounted the vacant throne, which now his brother
Fills (as loud fame reports) right royally ;
I then, unfit for pageantry and courts,
Retir'd me with a set of chosen vassals,
To my paternal seat. But ah ! not long
Had I enjoy'd the sweets of that recess,
Ere by the savage inroads of base hinds,
That sallied frequent from the Scottish heights,
My lands were all laid waste, my people murder'd ;
And I, thro' impotence of age unfit
To quell their brutal rage, was forc'd to drag
My mis'ries thro' the land, a friendless wand'rer.

C H O R U S.

We pity and condole thy wretched state,
But we can do no more ; which, on thy part,

Claims just returns of pity : for whose lot
 Demands it more than theirs, whom fate forbids
 To taste the joys of courteous charity ;
 To wipe the trickling tears, which dew the cheek
 Of palsy'd age ; to smooth its furrow'd brow,
 And pay its grey hairs each due reverence ?
 Yet such delight we are forbid to taste ;
 For 'tis our lord's command, that not a stranger,
 However high or lowly his degree,
 Have entrance at these gates.

O R G A R.

Who may this tyrant—

C H O R U S.

Alas, no tyrant he ; the more our wonder
 At this harsh mandate : Tendernefs and Pity
 Have made his breast their home. He is a man
 More apt, thro' inborn gentleness, to err,
 In giving mercy's tide too free a course,
 Than with a thrifty and illiberal hand
 To circumscribe its channel. This his praise
 You'll hear the general theme in Edgar's court :
 For Edgar ranks him first in his high favor ;
 Loads him with honors, which the Earl receives,
 As does the golden censer frankincense,
 Only to spread a sacred gale of blessings.
 Thro' all the realm.

E L F R I D A.

9

O R G A R.

Methinks, this pleasing portrait
Bears strong resemblance of Lord Athelwold,

C H O R U S.

Himself: no Briton but has heard his fame.

O R G A R.

'Tis wondrous strange; can you conceive no cause
For this his conduct?

C H O R U S.

None, that we may trust.

O R G A R.

Your garbs bespeak you for the fair attendants
Of some illustrious dame, the wife, or sister
Of this dread earl.

C H O R U S.

On this head too, old man,
We are commanded a religious silence:
Which strictly we obey; for well we know
Fidelity's the best and fairest wreath,
That can adorn a servant's brow. Farewell,
Depart with our best wishes; we do trespass
To hold such open converse with a stranger.

O R G A R.

Stay, Virgins, stay; have ye no friendly shed,
But bord'ring on your castle, where these limbs

Might lay their load of mis'ry for an hour?
 Have ye no food, however mean and homely,
 Wherewith I might support declining nature?
 Ev'n while I speak, I feel my spirits fail;
 And well, full well, I know, these trembling feet,
 Ere I can pace a hundred steps, will sink
 Beneath their wretched burthen.

C H O R U S.

Piteous sight!

What shall we do, my sisters? To admit
 This man beneath the roof, would be to scorn
 The Earl's strict interdict; and yet my heart
 Bleeds to behold that white, old, rev'rend head
 Bow'd with such misery.—Yes, we must aid him.
 Hie thee, poor Pilgrim, to yon neighb'ring bow'r,
 O'er which an old oak spreads his awful arm,
 Mantled in brownest foliage, and beneath
 The ivy, gadding from th' untwisted stem,
 Curtains each verdant side. There thou may'st rest,
 There also find some dry'd, autumnal fruit,
 Lodg'd in the hollow of its aged trunk.
 Much do we wish 'twere better fare.

O R G A R.

Kind Heav'n!

Reward.—

CHORUS.

Ah, stay not here to thank us,
 But haste to give your age this poor assistance.
 That done, we do conjure you leave the place
 With cautious secrecy; for was it known,
 That thus we trespass'd on our lord's command,
 The consequence were fatal.

O R G A R.

Fairest Maid!

Think not I'll basely draw down punishments
 On my preservers. I withdraw. May blessings
 Showr'd from yon fount of Bliss repay your kindness.

[Exit Orgar.]

S E M I C H O R U S.

Yes, sisters, yes, when pale distress
 Implores your aiding hand,
 Let not a partial faithfulness,
 Let not a mortal's vain command
 Urge you to break th' unalterable laws
 Of heav'n-descended Charity.
 Ah! follow still the soft-ey'd Deity;
 For know, each path she draws,
 Along the plain of life,
 Meets at the central dome of social Joy.
 Follow the soft-ey'd Deity;
 She bids ye, as ye hope for blessings, blest.
 Aid then the gen'ral cause of gen'ral happiness.

ELFRIDA.
SEMICHORUS.

Humanity thy awful strain
Shall ever meet our ear,
Sonorous, sweet, and clear.
And as amid the sprightly-swelling train
Of dulcet notes, that breathe
From flute or lyre,
The deep base rolls its manly melody,
Guiding the tuneful choir;
So thou, Humanity, shall lead along
Th' accordant passions in their moral song,
And give our mental concert truest harmony.

CHORUS.

But see, Elfrida comes.
Should we again resume our former strain,
And hail the Morn that paints her waking beauties;
Or wait her gentle bidding? Rather wait;
For, as I think, she seems in musing mood:
And there are times, when to the pensive soul
The warbling voice of softest melody
Seems but discordant harshness.

ELFRIDA, CHORUS.
ELFRIDA.

O my Virgins,
With what a leaden and retarding weight,
Does expectation load the wing of Time?
How have these three dull hours crept languid on,

Since first the crimson mantle of the morn
Skirted yon gay horizon? Say, my Friends,
Have I miscounted? Did not Athelwold
At parting fix this morn for his return.
This dear long-wish'd for morn? He did, he did,
And seal'd it with a kiss; I could not err.
And yet he comes not. He was wont outstrip
The sun's most early speed, and make its rising
To me unwish'd and needless. This delay
Creates strange doubts and scruples in my breast.
Courts throng with beauties, and my Athelwold
Has a soft, susceptible heart, as prone
To yield its love to ev'ry sparkling eye,
As is the musk-rose to dispense its fragrance
To ev'ry whisp'ring breeze; perhaps he's false,
Perhaps Elfrida's wretched.

C H O R U S.

See, Elfrida,

Ah see! how round yon branching elm the ivy
Twines its green chain, and poisons what supports it.
Not less injurious to the blooming shoots
Of growing love is sickly jealousy.

E L F R I D A.

My mind nor pines with sickly jealousy,
Nor triumphs in security and peace.
Who loves, must fear; and sure who loves like me,
Must greatly fear.

C H O R U S.

Yet whence the cause? Your Earl
Has ever yet (this little breach excepted)
Been punctual to appointment. Did his eye
Glow with less ardent passion when he left you,
Than at the first blest meeting? No! I mark'd him,
His parting glance shot fervent, constant love,
And fealty unalter'd. Do not fear him.

E L F R I D A.

I should not fear him, were his present stay
The only cause. Alas, it is not so!
Why comes my Earl so secret to these arms?
Why, but because he fears some other fair
Should hear of his stol'n transports? Why am I
Here shrouded up, like the pale Votarist,
Who knows no visitant, save the lone owl,
That leaves his ivy-crested battlement,
And sails on slow wing thro' the cloyster'd isles,
Lift'ning her faintly orisons. Why am I
Deny'd to follow my departing Lord
Whene'er his duty calls him to the palace?

C H O R U S.

Covet not that; the noblest proof of love
That Athelwold can give, is still to guard

Your tender beauties from the blasting taint
Of courtly gales. The delicate soft tints
Of snowy innocence, the crimson glow
Of blushing modesty, there all fly off,
And leave the faded face no nobler boast
Than well-rang'd, lifeless features. Ah, Elfrida,
Should you be doom'd, which happier fate forbid!
To drag your hours thro' all that nauseous scene
Of pageantry and vice; your purer breast,
True to its virtuous relish, soon would heave
A fervent sigh for innocence and Harewood.

E L F R I D A.

You much mistake me, Virgins; the throng'd palace
Were undesir'd by me, did not that palace
Detain my Athelwold. If he were here,
His presence would convert this range of oaks
To stately columns; these gay-liv'ried flow'rs
To troops of gallant ladies; and yon deer,
That jutt their antlers forth in sportive fray,
To armed knights at joust or tournament.
If Athelwold dwelt here; if no ambition
Could lure his steps from love, and this still forest;
If I might never moan his time of absence,
Longer than that which served him for the chase
Or of the wolf, or stag; or when he bore
The hood-wink'd falcon forth; might these, my
Virgins,

And these alone, be love's short intervals,
I should not have one thought remote from Hare-
wood.

C H O R U S.

And would you wish that Athelwold should slight
The weal of England, and on these light toys
Waste his unvalued hours? No, fond Elfrida;
His active soul is wing'd for nobler flights:
There let it soar, nor, like the lofty lark,
That rides the sun-beam warbling, sudden drop
And roost itself in the low earthy furrow.

E L F R I D A.

What then, must England's welfare hold my Earl
For ever from these shades?

C H O R U S.

We say not that.

The youth, who bathes in pleasure's limpid stream
At well-judg'd intervals, feels all his soul
Nerv'd with recruited strength; but if too oft
He swims in sportive mazes thro' the flood,
It chills his languid virtue. For this cause
Your Earl forbids, that these enchanting groves,
And their fair mistress should possess him wholly.
He knows he has a country and a king,
That claim his first attention; yet be sure,
'Twill not be long, ere his unbending mind
Shall seek a soft asylum from those cares,
Amid th' embow'ring shades that veil Elfrida.

E L F R I D A.

O be that speech prophetic; may he soon
Seek these embow'ring shades! Meanwhile, my
friends,
Tune some harmonious lay, whose sprightly notes
Flow in such happy descant as may speed
The lazy hours, that now move slowly on
With dull and flagging pinion. For sweet music
Has got a magic spell to aid their flight,
And make them skim thro' their diurnal round
Swift as the swallow circles. Come, ye Virgins,
Ye have been nurs'd 'mid Cornwall's wizard caves,
And oft have pac'd the fairy-peopled vales
Of Devon, where Posterity retains
Some vein of that old minstrelsy, which breath'd
Thro' each time-honor'd grove of British oak.
There, where the spreading consecrated boughs
Fed the sage mistletoe, the holy Druids
Lay rapt in moral musings; while the Bards
Call'd from their wiry harps such solemn airs,
As drew down Fancy from the realms of Light
To paint some radiant vision on their minds,
Of high mysterious import. Virgins, wake
Some strain as sweetly soothing. I, reclin'd
On yonder neighb'ring bank, will watch his coming.

[Exit. Elfrida.]

CHORUS.

ODE.

The Turtle tells her plaintive tale,
 Sequester'd in some shadowy vale;
 The Lark in radiant æther flotes,
 And swells his wild extatic notes:
 Meanwhile on yonder hawthorn-spray
 The Linnet wakes her temp'rate lay;
 She haunts no solitary shade,
 She flutters o'er no sun-shine mead,
 No love-lorn griefs depress her song,
 No raptures lift it loudly high,
 But soft she trills, amid th' aerial throng,
 Smooth simple strains of sob'rest harmony.

Sweet Bird! like thine our lay shall flow,
 Nor gaily loud, nor sadly slow;
 For to thy note sedate, and clear,
 CONTENT still lends a list'ning ear.
 Reclin'd this mossy bank along,
 Oft has she heard thy easy song:
 Why hears not now? What fairer grove
 From Harewood lures her devious love?
 What fairer grove than Harewood knows,
 More woodland walks, more fragrant gales,

More shadowy bowers, inviting soft repose.
More streams flow-wand'ring thro' her winding vales.

Perhaps to some lone cave the Rover flies,
Where lull'd in pious peace the Hermit lies.
For, scorning oft the gorgeous hall,
Where banners wave with blazon'd gold,
There will the meek-ey'd Nymph delight to call,
And with the solemn Seer high converse hold.

There, Goddess, on the shaggy mound,
Where tumbling torrents roar around,
Where pendant mountains o'er your head
Stretch their formidable shade;
You listen, while the holy Seer
Slowly chaunts his vespers clear;
Or of his sparing melfs partake,
The fav'ry pulse, the wheaten cake,
The bev'rage cool of limpid rill.
Then, rising light, your host you bless,
And o'er his faintly temples bland distill
Seraphic day-dreams of heaven's happiness.

Where'er thou art, enchanting Maid,
Thou soon wilt smile in Harewood's shade :
Soon will thy fairy feet be seen,
Printing this dew-impearled green ;
Soon shall we mark thy gestures meek,
Thy glitt'ring eye, and dimpled cheek,
What time thou seek'st, with willing haste,
Thy lov'liest throne, Elfrida's breast.
There seated on that iv'ry shrine,
Where all the Loves and Graces lye,
With them your hands shall mutual chaplets twine,
And weave immortal wreaths of peace and joy.

And, hark, compleating our prophetic strain,
The fleet hoof rattles o'er the flinty plain ;
Now nearer, and now nearer sounds.
Avaunt ! ye vain, delusive Fears.
Hark ! Echo tells thro' Harewood's amplest bounds,
That Love, Content, and Athelwold appears.

ELFRIDA. 21
ATHELWOLD, ELFRIDA,
CHORUS.

ATHELWOLD.

Look ever thus ; with that bright glance of joy
Thus alway meet my transports. Let these arms
Thus ever fold me ; and this cheek, that blooms
With all health's op'ning roses, press my lips,
Warm as at this blest moment.

ELFRIDA.

Athelwold,

I had prepar'd me many a stern rebuke ;
Had arm'd my brow with frowns, and taught my eye
Th' averted glance of coldness, which might best
Greet such a loit'ring lover ; but I find,
'Twas a vain task ; for this my truant heart
Forgets each lesson, which resentment taught,
And in thy sight knows only to be happy.

ATHELWOLD.

My best Elfrida—Heav'ns : It cannot last.
The giddy height of joy, to which I'm lifted,
Is as a hanging rock, at whose low foot
The black and beating surge of Infamy
Rolls ready to receive, and sink my soul.

ELFRIDA.

So soon to fall into this musing mood—
I thought, my Lord, you promis'd you would leave

These cares behind at court. Nay, 'twas the cause
 Assign'd for this my residence at Harewood,
 That you might never come to these fond arms,
 But with a breast devoid of public toil,
 And fill'd alone with rapture and Elfrida.
 Said you not so? Why then that pensive look,
 That down-cast eye, that settled musing posture?
 Surely the City's din, and this still forest
 Have lost their difference. Wherefore stay I here?
 I'll with you to the palace.

A T H E L W O L D.

Heav'n forbid!

E L F R I D A.

Nay, my best Lord, I meant it but in sport;
 For should you bid me quit these blooming lawns,
 For some bare heath, or drear unpeopled desert;
 Believe me, I would think its wildness Eden,
 If Athelwold with frequent visitation
 Endear'd the savage scene: but yet I fear
 My Father.

A T H E L W O L D.

Hah! why him?

E L F R I D A.

You know his temper;
 How jealous of his rank, and his trac'd lineage
 From royal ancestry. I fear me much,

He will not brook you should conceal me long
In this lone privacy : No, he will deem it
Far unbecoming her, whose veins are fill'd
With the rich stream of his nobility.
Should it be so, his hot and fiery nature,
I doubt, will blaze, and do some dreadful outrage.

A T H E L W O L D :

He need not know it, or, if chance he should,
It matters not, if so this forest life
Seem of your own adoption and free choice.
And that it will so seem, I trust that love,
Which ever yet has met my wayward will
With pleas'd compliance, and unask'd assent.

E L F R I D A.

And ever shall : yet blame me not, my Lord,
If prying womanhood should prompt a wish
To learn the cause of this your strange commotion,
Which ever wakes, if I but drop one thought
Of quitting Harewood.

A T H E L W O L D.

Go to the clear surface
Of yon unruffled lake, and, bending o'er it,
There read my answer.

E L F R I D A.

These are riddles, Sir—

E L F R I D A.

A T H E L W O L D.

No ; for its glassy and reflecting surface
Will smile with charms too tempting for a palace.

E L F R I D A.

Does Athelwold distrust Elfrida's faith ;

A T H E L W O L D.

No : but he much distrusts Elfrida's beauty.

E L F R I D A.

Away : you trifle.

A T H E L W O L D.

Never more in earnest ;

I would not for the throne which Edgar sits on,
That Edgar should behold it.

E L F R I D A.

What, my Lord,

Think you the face, that caught your single heart,
Will make all hearts its captives ? Vain surmise.
Yet grant it could ; the face is your's alone :
Not Edgar's self would dare to seize it from you.
Edgar's a King, and not a tyrant.

A T H E L W O L D.

True,

Edgar's a King, a just one ; his firm feet
Walk ever in the fore-right road of honor :
Nor do I know what lure can draw his steps
Devious from that straight path, save only one :

That tempting lure is beauty. Ah! Elfrida,
Throw but the daz'ling bait within his view,
The untam'd wolf does not with fiercer rage
Burst the slight bondage of the filken net,
Than he the ties of law. Late, very late,
Smit casually with young Matilda's face,
He strait commanded her reluctant Mother
To yield her to his arms: nor had she 'scap'd
The violating fervor of his love,
Had not the prudent dame suborn'd her handmaid,
To take the unchast office, and be led
Veil'd in the mask of night, to Edgar's chamber
A counterfeit Matilda. As it chanc'd,
The damsel pleas'd the king, nor did detection
A whit abate his fondness; he forgave
The prudent mother, eas'd Matilda's fears,
And led the wanton minstrel to his court,
Where still she shares—

C H O R U S.

Behold, Earl Athelwold,
A messenger arrives; his speed and aspect
Speak some important errand.

EDWIN, ATHELWOLD, ELFRIDA,
CHORUS.

ATHELWOLD.

How now, Edwin?

EDWIN.

The King, my Lord, is on his way to Harewood.

ATHELWOLD.

The King!

EDWIN.

His purpose is to pass thro' Mercia ;
And in a hasty message, some two hours
After you left the palace, this his pleasure
Was sent you by Lord Seofrid ; withal
Commanding your attendance. You being absent,
He straitway turn'd his course thro' this fair forest,
Meaning to chase the Stag ; his train is small,
As was his purpose sudden.

E L F R I D A.

Good, my Lord,

Why thus perplex'd ?

C H O R U S.

Heav'ns ? what a deep Despair
Sits on his brow ?

E L F R I D A.

The notice sure is short ;
But that's a trifle, a small train requires
The smaller preparation : Let him come.

ATHELWOLD.

Yes, let him come : so thou wilt say, Elfrida,
When thou hast heard my tale. Yes, let him come,
So wilt thou say, and let thy husband perish.
Yet shall these arms once more embrace thee closely,
Ere yet thou fly them as the pois'nous adder.
'Tis o'er : in that embrace Elfrida's Love
Was buried ; and in that embrace, the Peace
Of wretched Athelwold.

ELFRIDA.

What may this be !

ATHELWOLD.

O Edwin, Edwin, when surviving Malice
Shall prey upon the Fame of thy dead Master,
Wilt thou not someway strive to check the Fiend's
Insatiate fury ? Wilt thou see my name
Defil'd, and blacken'd with Detraction's venom,
And bear it patiently !

ELFRIDA.

What means my best—

ATHELWOLD.

Peace ; not a word of Best, or Lov'd, or Dear :
These are not titles now for thee to use,
Or me to triumph in. Virgins, retire ;
We would awhile be private. Nay, return,

Concealment would be vain; and ye and Edwin
Are bound to me. Albina! as for you,
I sav'd your father, when his blood was forfeit.

C H O R U S.

Not I, great Earl, alone, but all this train
Are bound by ev'ry tye of faith and love
To gen'rous Athelwold; to that mild master,
Who never forc'd our Service to one act,
But of such liberal sort, as Freedom's self
Would smilingly perform.

A T H E L W O L D.

It may be so,

But where's the tye, Elfrida, that may bind
Thy faith and love.

E L F R I D A.

The strongest sure, my Lord,

The golden, nuptial tye. Try but its strength.

A T H E L W O L D.

I must perforce this instant. Know, Elfrida,
Once, on a day of high festivity,
The youthful King, encircled with his Nobles,
Crown'd high the sparkling bowl; and much of
Love,
Of beauty much the sprightly converse ran.
When, as it well might chance, the brisk Lord
Ardulph

Made gallant note of Orgar's peerless daughter,
 And in such phrase as might enflame a breast
 More cool than Edgar's. Early on the morrow
 Th' impatient Monarch gave me swift commission
 To view those charms, of which Lord Ardulph's
 tongue

Had giv'n such warm description : to whose words
 If my impartial eye gave full assent,
 I had his royal mandate on the instant
 To hail you Queen of England.

E L F R I D A.

'Stead of which

You came, and hail'd me Wife of Athelwold.
 Was this the tale I was so taught to fear ?
 Was this the deed, that known would make me fly
 Thy clasping arm, as 'twere the pois'nous adder ?
 No, let this tender, fond embrace assure thee,
 That thy Elfrida's love can never die ;
 Or, if it could, this animating touch
 Would soon rewake it into life and rapture.

A T H E L W O L D.

Dost thou then pardon me ? Come, injur'd sovereign,
 Plunge deep thy sword of justice in this breast,
 And I will die contented.

E L F R I D A.

Heav'n forbid !

What can be done ?

ELFRIDA.

CHORUS.

Indeed, ye constant pair,
 'Tis fit ye strive to fly the coming danger.
 For Safety now sits wav'ring on your Love,
 Like the light down upon the Thistle's beard
 Which ev'ry breeze may part. Say, noble Earl,
 What feint was us'd to lull the king's impatience?

ATHELWOLD.

Soon as these shades had veil'd my beauteous bride,
 I hasted back to Edgar, laugh'd at Ardulph,
 And talk'd of Elfrid, as of vulgar beauties;
 Own'd no uncommon light'ning in her eye,
 No breast that sham'd the snow, or cheek the rose.
 The sprightly King believ'd me, and forgot her.

CHORUS.

But an alliance, great as Athelwold's
 With Orgar's daughter, soon would blaze abroad,
 The theme of popular converse.

ATHELWOLD.

True, it would;
 And for that Reason, when I last was here,
 The King was taught I went to wed Elfrida.

ELFRIDA.

How so, my Lord?

A T H E L W O L D.

Thy Father, my Elfrida,
Has rich possessions: These, and these alone,
I made my theme of Love; and told the king,
That tho' thy face (pardon the impious falsehood)
Boasted not charms to grace a Monarch's throne,
Yet would thy dow'r well suit his minister.
I therefore meant to ask thee of thy father,
And (that my want of skill in choice might 'scape
All censure) hide thee close in Harewood castle.
Edgar with smiles consented, and, I think,
Harbours no thought of my disloyalty.

E L F R I D A.

If so, what danger now?

A T H E L W O L D.

Ask'st thou, what danger?
'Sdeath, will that glance not instantly proclaim
My tenfold treachery?

E L F R I D A.

He shall not see me.
I'll hide me instant in some secret chamber,
And robe this virgin in my bridal vestments.

A T H E L W O L D.

Thy Love, like balm, runs trick'ling o'er the wounds
Of my torn bosom; yet 'tis vain, 'tis vain;

E L F R I D A.

Thou must thy self appear, for Ardulph ever
Attends the king, and would detect the fraud.

E L F R I D A.

If so, yet still I can ensure our safety;
For as you fear my softness of complexion.
I'll stain it with the juice of dusky leaves,
Or yellow berries, which this various wood
From tree or shrub will yield me. These I'll use,
And form a thousand methods to conceal
The little gleams of grace, which Nature lent me.
Fear not my caution.

A T H E L W O L D.

Gentlest, best of Creatures,
Go, do then as thy tender care directs.
And yet how vain? What wond'rous art can steal
The liquid lightnings from those radiant eyes,
Or rob the wavy ringlets of that hair
Of all their nameless graces; Say it could,
Yet would that modest, but majestic mien,
That inborn dignity of soul, which breathes
Thro' each angelic gesture, still remain
To seize the heart of Edgar. Rest, Elfrida,
Rest as thou art, in all that blaze of beauty:
I must submit to my just lot and lose thee.

E L F R I D A.

Away, my Lord, with these too anxious scruples :
Fear not my carriage ; I will stoop my head,
Drawl out an idiot phrase, and do each act
With ev'n a rude and peasant awkwardness.

E D W I N.

Ere this, my Lord, I think, the King has reach'd
The full midway ; 'twere fit you stood prepar'd
To give him meeting.

A T H E L W O L D.

Give him meeting, Edwin !

Alas ! I have no mask to veil my baseness.
When deep contrition shadows all my soul,
I cannot dress my features in light smiles,
And look the thing I am not. No, these eyes
Are not as yet true vassals to my purpose,
As yet indeed I am but half a villain.

E L F R I D A.

You weigh this matter in too nice a balance.
Your crime, my Lord, is but the crime of love :
Thousands like you have fail'd.

A T H E L W O L D.

I know, Elfrida,

Could love absolve the crime, my soul were pure
As maiden innocence. Yes, I do love thee,

E

E L F R I D A.

And thou art fair—beyond—But that's my bane ;
 Thy ev'ry charm adds weight to my offence,
 And heaps fresh wrongs upon the best of Masters.
 Yes, Elfrid, Edgar was the best of Masters.
 O hide me from the thought in that dear bosom—
 Heavens ! I must die or keep her.

E L F R I D A.

Live, or die,
 I'm thine alike. Death cannot aught abate,
 Or life augment, my love. Let this embrace
 Be witness of my truth.

A T H E L W O L D.

It shall, it shall :
 Thy ev'ry word and look declares thee faithful,
 Secure of all thy love, and all thy prudence,
 Returning confidence has arm'd my soul
 For this dread meeting : resting on thy truth
 I go—

[*Exit Athelwold.*]

E L F R I D A.

Go, and thy guardian faint preserve thee,
 Show'r blessings vast as would my lavish love,
 Had I his power to bless thee !

C H O R U S.

Yes, my Sisters,
 The silent awe that reigns thro' all your train,

E L F R I D A.

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Befits ye well. Let no unhallow'd tongue
Dare to profane her virtue by its praise.
'Tis a bright prodigy, which Admiration
Must stand in silent gaze at, and behold
Full-plum'd Perfection take its eagle flight
Above Ambition, Sov'reignty, and Pride;
Above——

E L F R I D A.

What could Ambition to a heart
So fill'd with love as mine? If my late act
Had aught of noble and superior grace,
Impute it all to Love, to virtuous Love,
Than which what passion more impels the mind
To fair and gen'rous action? But the hours
Are precious now. I'll to yon neighb'ring grove:
There grows an azure flow'r, I oft have mark'd it,
Which stains the pressing finger, with a juice
Of dusky, yellow tinct: its name I know not.
I'll fetch and try it strait. Wait my return.

[*Exit Elfrida.*

C H O R U S.

O D E.

Whence does this sudden Lustre rise,
 That gilds the grove? Not like the noontide beam,
 Which sparkling dances on the trembling stream,
 Nor the blue light'nings flash swift-shooting thro'
 the skies.

But such a solemn stedd' Light,
 As o'er the cloudless azure steals,
 When Cynthia riding on the brow of night,
 Stops in their mid career her silver wheels.

Whence can it rise, but from the sober pow'r
 Of CONSTANCY? She, heav'n-born Queen
 Descends, and in this woodbine-vested bower,
 Fixes her steadfast reign:
 Stedfast, as when her high command
 Gives to the starry band
 Their radiant Stations in heav'n's ample plain.
 Stedfast, as when around this nether sphere,
 She winds the purple year.
 Tells what time the Snow-drop cold
 Its maiden whiteness may unfold,
 When the golden harvest bend,
 When the ruddy fruits descend.

Then bids pale Winter wake, to pour
The pearly hail's translucent show'r,
To cast his silv'ry mantle o'er the woods,
And bind in crystal chains the slumb'ring floods.

The Soul, which she inspires, has pow'r to climb
To all the heights sublime
Of Virtue's tow'ring hill.

That hill, at whose low foot weak-warbling strays
The scanty stream of human praise,
A shallow trickling rill.

While on the Summits hov'ring Angels shed,
From their blest pinions, the nectareous dew
Of rich immortal Fame: From these the Muse
Oft steals some precious drops, and skilful blends
With those the lower fountain lends;

Then show'rs it all on some high-favor'd head.

But thou, Elfrida, claim'st the genuine dew;

Thy worth demands it all,

Pure, and unmixt on thee the sacred drops shall fall.

Elfrida returns with flowers.

End of Act 2



E L F R I D A, O R G A R, C H O R U S.

E L F R I D A. [*looking on the flower.*]

'Tis strange, my Virgins, this sweet child of Summer,
Silken and soft, whose breath perfumes the air,
Whose gay vest paints the Morn, should in its bosom
Hide such pollution? Yet 'tis often thus :
All are not as they seem.

O R G A R.

Yet hear me, Lady.

E L F R I D A.

Be gone, unmanner'd Stranger, nor pursue me ;
Hence, from the grove. Know ye this Pilgrim,
Virgins?

On my return I met him here.

C H O R U S.

Alas ;

He came at break of day, and told a tale,
That mov'd our pity—But I fear me now,
'Twas false ; some spy perchance, and may have
heard—

O R G A R.

I have ; yet not for that are you betray'd.
Fair Excellence, my heart is bound unto you,
I feel a tender interest in your welfare,
Tender as Fathers feel.

E L F R I D A.

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E L F R I D A.

As Fathers feel ;
That well-known voice, and ah ! that look—

O R G A R.

Elfrida !

E L F R I D A.

Yes, it is he, it is my Father, Virgins.
Support me, or I faint ! O wherefore, Sir ?—

O R G A R.

Take courage, Daughter ; my parental fondness
Prompted this visit. Thus I came disguis'd,
To learn the cause of my dear child's confinement :
And I have learnt it.

E L F R I D A.

Then all's lost for ever.

O R G A R.

Thou know'st, Elfrida, next my house's honor,
Thy peace has ever been my dearest care.
But such an insult—No : I cannot brook it.
So black a fraud ! By all my ancestors,
By Belin's shade, I will have ample vengeance.

E L F R I D A.

Alas, I know too well your dreadful purpose.
I knew it at the first. Yes, he must fall.

Yet pardon me, if my poor trembling heart
 Puts up I know not what of pray'rs and vows
 To ev'ry pitying saint. Celestial Guardians
 Of nuptial Constancy! O bend from heav'n
 Your star-crown'd heads, and hear a wretched wo-
 man,

That begs ye save, from a dread father's rage,
 Her lord, her husband.

O R G A R.

Husband! 'Sdeath what husband?
 Is Athelwold thy husband? Sooner call
 Th' impeached thief true master of the booty
 He stole, or murder'd for. Disdain the Villain;
 And help me to revenge thee.

C H O R U S.

Think, great Earl;
 What sanctimonious ties restrain your daughter.
 Did she not swear before the hallow'd shrine
 Eternal fealty to this her Lord?
 Yet say, that he deceived her; shall her truth
 Dare to revenge? No, Sir, in highest heav'n
 Vengeance 'mid storms and tempests sits enshrined,
 Vested in robes of light'ning, and there sleeps,
 Unwak'd but by th' incens'd Almighty's call.
 O! let not Man presume to take unbid
 That dread vicegerency.

ORGAR.

Peace, Virgins, peace.

Not ev'n the faws of Druids or of Bards
Have weight with me, when insults high as this
Rouse my just indignation. Hear me, Daughter,
You went to search for flow'rs, to blot your charms
With their dun hue. Yes, you may search for flow'rs,
Yet shall they be the loveliest of the spring;
Flow'rs, that entangling in your auburn hair,
Or blushing mid the whiteness of your bosom,
May, to the power of ev'ry native grace,
Give double life, and lustre. Haste, my child,
Array thyself in thy most gorgeous garb,
And see each jewel, which my Love procur'd thee,
Dart its full radiance. More than all, put on
The nobler ornament of winning smiles,
And kind inviting glances.

ELFRIDA.

Never, never;
When this true heart renounces Athelwold,
May equitable heav'n —

ORGAR.

Nay, swear not, Daughter;
But with a duteous, and attentive Ear,
Listen to my persuasions. Much I wish
Persuasions might prevail, that not compell'd

E L F R I D A.

To use a father's just prerogative,
 My will may meet with thy unforc'd obedience.
 Follow me, on thy duty.

E L F R I D A.

Cruel Father,
 That duty shall obey you; I will follow:
 Yet not to quit my Love. So Mercy shield me,
 As I hold true to Athelwold!

[Exeunt Orgar and Elfrida.]

S E M I C H O R U S.

Horror! Horror!
 The Pen of Fate dipt in it's deepest gall,
 Perhaps on that ill-omen'd wall,
 Now writes th' event of this tremendous day.
 O! that our weaker fight
 Could read the mystic characters, and spy
 What to the unpurg'd, mortal Eye,
 Is hid in endless Night.

S E M I C H O R U S.

Suspense! thou frozen guest, be gone.
 The wretch, whose rugged bed
 Is lin'd with thorns, more softly rests his head,
 Than he who sinks amid the cycnet's down,
 If thou tormenting fiend be nigh,
 To prompt his starting tear, his ceaseless sigh,
 His wish, his pray'r, his vow for ling'ring certainty.

C H O R U S.

But hark ! that certainty arrives. Methought
I heard the winding horn. I did not err ;
The King is near at hand. This quick approach
Will sure prevent this proud Earl's cruel purpose.
Yet what of that ? Does her fair form require
The blazon of rich vesture ? Genuine beauty
Nor asks, nor needs it : Negligence alone
Is its bright diadem, and artless ease
Its robe of Tyrian tincture. Say, my Sisters,
Shall we salute this monarch with a hymn
Of Festival and Joy ! Alas, such joy
Ill suits our trembling hearts, and weeping eyes.
And now 'twere vain ; for see, the King approaches.

EDGAR, ATHELWOLD, CHORUS.

E D G A R.

No, Athelwold ; not from a partial blindness,
Or from the mode and guise of courtesy,
Are we thus large in praise ; in our true judgment,
This castle is not more kind Nature's debtor
For this its happy site, than 'tis to thee
For that just symmetry, and modest skill
Which decks the gen'ral structure. Not a frieze,
Or moulded pediment, but in its parts
Claims kindred with the whole ; for Ornament

Is here the offspring of Necessity,
Not the vain flourish of unmeaning art.

[*seeing the Chorus.*

But ah! what nobler beauties catch mine eye?
Thy castle's beauty, my lov'd Athelwold,
Has amplest proof, in having pow'r to hold
Mine eye from such a prospect. Pardon, fair ones;
To take your graces thus at second note
Was sure uncommon blindness.

A T H E L W O L D.

Heav'ns! they weep.

What may this mean? Some dread and unseen
chance

Has counterwork'd my safety.

E D G A R.

Whence this silence;

Why are your lovely heads thus bow'd with sadness?
Beshrew my heart, my Lord, but this is strange.
I know thee, Earl, and know thy gentleness,
More prone t'obey, than lord it o'er the sex;
Else should I guess this sorrow had its rise,
From some discourteous treatment.

C H O R U S.

No, dread Sov'reign;

He is the noblest, gentlest, best of masters;
And may your Love reward——

ORGAR, ATHELWOLD, EDGAR,
CHORUS.

ATHELWOLD.

Death to my hopes!

ORGAR.

Yes, Villain, start; but let this vengeful arm
Arrest thy baseness; would to heav'n its strength
Thus grasping thee, could open thy false breast,
And bare thy heart to the sham'd eye of Day.

EDGAR.

Patience, hot Man. What art thou?

ORGAR.

I am Orgar—

Pardon me, Prince; that this my honest rage
O'erleaps obedient duty. I am wrong'd,
Yet that's but small; 'tis not my private wrongs,
But your's, much-injur'd prince, that call for justice.
Yes, Sir, I here on a true subject's oath
Proclaim Earl Athelwold a faithless traitor.

EDGAR.

Ha! what is this? Renounce the word, old Earl;
Thy length of years hath forc'd thee, sure, to press
The verge of dotage. Athelwold! what Athelwold
A faithless traitor! Perish the suspicion.

Never before did word, or thought, or look,
Give doubt of his distinguish'd loyalty.
Dotage alone could frame the accusation.

O R G A R.

I do not dote, thank Heav'n, my faculties
Are yet my own, unblemish'd and unhurt.
Would so my Daughter were!

E D G A R.

What is his drift?

A T H E L W O L D.

Better, my royal Lord, you mark'd him not;
The wayward Earl is—

O R G A R.

What, audacious Villain!

I will be heard.

E D G A R.

Go to, thou choleric Lord.

O R G A R.

When thou hast heard me, King, then call me
choleric.

E D G A R,

Speak then, and briefly.

O R G A R.

Once, my sacred Liege,
I had a daughter, duteous as e'er crown'd
A Father's wish, and lovely as could warm
A youth to am'rous transports. This, my Lord,
You learnt long since from noble Ardulph's praises,
And fired with his description, sent this Earl,
This faithful Earl, t'invite her to our throne.

E D G A R.

No, Orgar, not t'invite her to our throne,
Simply to note her beauty was his errand.

O R G A R.

Yes, he did note it, stamp't it for his own.
But why this parley? Enter, Sir, these gates,
And let Elfrida's features be the book,
Where you may read the story of his falsehood,
Ev'n at one glance.

E D G A R.

Lead on then, noble Lord.
We'll follow to the tryal. I will humour
The Earl's hot temper. He has heard, my friend,
We meant t'exalt his daughter, and for that,
His partial fondness, link'd with his ambition,
Levels this rage at thee. Attend us, Lords.

[*Exeunt Edgar, Orgar, &c.*]

CHORUS, ATHELWOLD.

CHORUS.

My Lord, the King is enter'd : stand not thus
In statue-like Distress.

ATHELWOLD.

Away, away ;

What ! can a Man that thinks such thoughts as I do
Have pow'r of act, and motion ? speak to me ;
Inform me all. What said she, when I left her ?
How came her Father hither ? how did she
Greet his arrival ? Say was she compell'd,
Or did her free, and voluntary voice,
Tell all the story ? Did she marshal him,
To this his deed of vengeance ?

CHORUS.

Dearest Master ;

Elfrida told him not : his own deceit
Was his informer. Here the Earl arrived
Early at morn, in mean and pilgrim weeds,
All like an antient, toil-worn traveller ;
And with a tale told in such piteous strain,
Fraught with such sad and moving circumstance,
With woes so well dissembled ; that our softness,
Suffer'd him enter this close bow'r for rest,
Which he adapting to his prying purpose,

Thence learnt the secret. This our disobedience,
We own—

A T H E L W O L D.

Was my perdition, yet 'tis well;
I blame ye not; it was the work of Fate.
Fate brought him hither, Fate annull'd your faith.
I do not think, you purpos'd my destruction;
But yet you have destroy'd me. O Elfrida,
And art thou faithful? This my jealous eye
Thought it had markt some speck of change upon
thee;
Thought it had found, what might have made thy loss
Somewhat within endurance. 'Tis not so;
And this thy purity but serves t'augment
The sum of my distractions. Meet me, Edgar,
With thy rais'd sword: be merciful and sudden—
[Exit Athelwold.]

E L F R I D A.

C H O R U S.

O D E.

Say, will no white-rob'd Son of Light,
 Swift-darting from his heav'nly height,
 Here deign to take his hallow'd stand;
 Here wave his amber locks, unfold
 His pinions cloth'd with downy gold;
 Here smiling stretch his tutelary wand?
 And you, ye host of Saints, for ye have known
 Each dreary path in Life's perplexing maze,
 Tho' now ye circle yon eternal throne
 With harpings high of inexpressive praise,
 Will not your train descend in radiant state,
 To break with Mercy's beam this gathering cloud
 of Fate?

'Tis silence all. No Son of Light
 Darts swiftly from his heav'nly height,
 No train of radiant Saints descend.
 "Mortals, in vain ye hope to find,
 "If guilt, if fraud has stain'd your mind,
 "Or Saint to hear, or Angel to defend."
 So TRUTH proclaims. I hear the sacred sound
 Burst from the centre of her burning throne.

Where aye she sits with star-wreath'd lustre
crown'd,

A bright Sun clasps her adamantine zone.

So TRUTH proclaims: her awful voice I hear,
With many a solemn pause it slowly meets my ear.

“ Attend, ye Sons of Men; attend, and say,
Does not enough of my refulgent ray
Break thro' the veil of your mortality!
Say, does not reason in this form descry
Unnumber'd, nameless glories, that surpass
The Angel's floating pomp, the Seraph's glowing
grace?

Shall then your earth-born daughters vie
With me? Shall she, whose brightest eye
But emulates the diamond's blaze,
Whose cheek but mocks the peaches bloom,
Whose breath the hyacinth's perfume,
Whose melting voice the warbling woodlark's lays:
Shall she be deem'd my rival? Shall a form
Of elemental dross, of moul'dring clay,
Vie with these charms imperial? The poor worm
Shall prove her contest vain. Life's little day
Shall pass, and she is gone: while I appear,
Flush'd with the bloom of youth thro' Heav'n's
eternal year.

Know, Mortals, know; ere first ye sprung,
Ere first these orbs in æther hung,
I shone amid the heav'nly throng.
These eyes beheld Creation's day,
This voice began the choral lay,
And taught Archangels their triumphant song.
Pleas'd I survey'd bright Nature's gradual
birth,
Saw infant Light with kindling lustre spread,
Soft vernal fragrance clothe the flow'ring earth,
And Ocean heave on his extended bed;
Saw the tall pine aspiring pierce the sky,
The tawny Lion stalk, the rapid Eagle fly.

Last, Man arose, erect in youthful grace,
Heav'n's hallow'd image stamp'd upon his face,
And, as he rose, the high behest was giv'n
“ That I alone of all the host of heav'n,
“ Should reign Protectress of the godlike
Youth.”

Thus the Almighty spake: he spake and call'd me
TRUTH.

ATHELWOLD, EDWIN, CHORUS.

A T H E L W O L D.

Banish me! No. I'll die. For why should Life
Remain a lonely lodger in that breast
Which Honor leaves untenanted. Vain breath!
Thou ill can'st fill such vacancy. Be gone.
This sword shall free——

C H O R U S.

O shame to Fortitude!
Shame to that manly passion, which inspires
It vig'rous warmth, when the bleak blasts of Fate
Would chill the soul. O call the ready virtue
Quick to thy aid, for she is ever near thee,
Is ever prompt to spread her sevenfold shield
O'er noble breasts.

A T H E L W O L D.

And but o'er noble breasts;
Not o'er the breast which livid Infamy
Indelibly has spotted. O shame, shame.
Sword, rid me of the thought.

C H O R U S.

Forbear, forbear ;
 Think what a sea of deep perdition whelms
 The wretch's trembling soul, who launches forth
 Unlicenc'd to Eternity. Think, think,
 And let the thought restrain thy impious hand.
 The race of Man is one vast marshal'd army,
 Summon'd to pass the spacious realms of Time,
 Their leader the Almighty. In that march
 Ah who may quit his post ? when high in Air
 The hos'n Archangel rides, whose right hand weilds
 Th' imperial standard of heav'n's providence,
 Which dreadly sweeping thro' the vaulted sky
 O'er shadows all creation.

A T H E L W O L D.

I was once ———
 Yes, I was once (I have his royal word for't)
 A man of such try'd faith, such steady honor,
 As mock'd all doubt and scruple.—What a change!
 Now must that unstain'd, virgin character,
 Be doom'd to gross and hourly prostitution
 Sating the lust of slander ; and my wife,
 My chaste Elfrida ! O distraction, no,
 I'll fly to save her.

ELFRIDA.

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EDWIN.

Stay, my dearest Master ;
You rush on instant death.

ATHELWOLD.

I mean it, slave,
And would'st thou hinder me ?

EDWIN.

Yes, Sir, I hold
'Tis duty to my king, and love to you,
Thus to oppose your entrance.

ATHELWOLD.

What, thou traitor !
Thy pardon, Edwin, I forgot myself ;
Forgot, that I stood here a banish'd Man,
And that this gate was shut against its Master.
And yet this gate leads to my dear Elfrida,
Can it be barr'd to me ? O Earth, cold Earth,
Upon whose breast I cast this load of mis'ry,
Bear it awhile ; and you ye aged Oaks,
Ye venerable Fathers of this wood,
Who oft have cool'd beneath your arching shades
My humble ancestors, oft seen them hie
To your spread umbrage, from yon sultry field,
Their scene of honest labor. Shade, ah ! shade,

The last, the wretchedest of all their race.
 I will not long pollute ye; for I mean
 To pay beneath your consecrated gloom
 A sacrifice to honor, and the ghosts
 Of those progenitors, who sternly frown
 On me their base descendant.

E D W I N.

See, ye Virgins,
 How Horror shades his brow; how fixt his eye;
 Heav'ns! what despair—

C H O R U S.

Edwin, 'tis ever thus
 With noble minds, if chance they slide to folly;
 Remorse stings deeper, and relentless Conscience,
 Pours more of gall into the bitter cup
 Of their severe repentance.

A T H E L W O L D.

'Tis resolv'd,
 I'll enter and demand a second audience.
 And yet how vain? Ere I can reach his ear,
 His ready train will stop me, and with all
 The cruel punctuality of office,
 So prompt to act 'gainst fallen favorites,
 Dismiss me with reproof.—Surely I heard her.
 Was't not Elfrida's voice? 'Tis she herself.

ELFRIDA, EDGAR, ATHELWOLD,
ORGAR, CHORUS.

E L F R I D A.

No, I will once more clasp him to my bosom!
I will not be withheld. I will o'ertake him,
Will follow him to exile. Hah, my Husband!
So quickly found? They thought to tear me from
thee,
But we will part no more.

E D G A R.

Take heed, Elfrida,
This ill-tim'd fondness may recall the fate
I just now freed him from; who loves like me
Can ill brook this. Or quit him, or he dies.

A T H E L W O L D.

Yes, let me die! Death is my dearest wish.
Quit me, Elfrida! leave me to my fate.
'Tis just, 'tis just. Thus to my sov'reign's sword
Freely I bare my breast. Strike, injur'd Prince;
But do not banish me.

E L F R I D A.

What, Athelwold,
Is then the life, on whose dear preservation
Elfrida's peace depends, not worth the saving?

Die then. But ere thy murd'rer strikes the stroke,
Let me inform him, that his act destroys
No single life.

E D G A R.

By heav'n, she loves the traitor
Beyond all hope of change—

E L F R I D A.

No, Athelwold,
Thou shalt not die. That pause in royal Edgar
Bespeaks calm recollection and weigh'd thought,
And his relenting tongue shall quickly seal
Thy lib'ral pardon. Come, my Lord, let's kneel;
Now's the blest time; here let us kneel together,
And as these streaming eyes and lifted hands
Employ each act of silent supplication,
Do thou recount—Ah! no, thy modest tongue
Could never tell ev'n half the gallant story.
Be silent then. Let Edgar's self reflect,
For well I know his Mem'ry writes thy Virtues
Upon its fairest page. Yes, let him weigh
All thy past deeds of loyalty and faith,
'Gainst this so light a fault.

EDGAR.

So light a fault!

Had he dislodg'd my richest coffer'd treasures,
Dispers'd sedition's poison 'mid my troops,
Or aim'd with daring and rebellious hand
To snatch these regal honors from my brow,
I sooner could have pardon'd.

ATHELWOLD.

Cease, Elfrida.

My doom is just—Yes, royal Sir, I'll go
To banishment. I do deserve to breathe,
Deserve to bear this load of life about me,
For many years; to lengthen out my age,
List'ning the hourly knell of curst remembrance,
Whose leaden stroke shall tell to my sad soul
That I was faithful once.

ELFRIDA.

O flinty Edgar,

What! will this penitence not move thee? Know
There is a rose-lip'd Seraph sits on high,
Who ever bends his holy ear to earth
To mark the voice of Penitence, to catch
Her solemn sighs, to tune them to his harp,

And echo them in harmonies divine
 Up to the throne of grace. Ev'n Heav'n is won
 By Penitence, and shall Heav'n's substitute,
 Shall Edgar scorn—

E D G A R.

Cease, cease, thou beauteous pleader!
 Ah far too beauteous! Wouldst thou gain thy suit,
 Why glows that vermeil lip? why rolls that eye
 Bright as the ray of Morn? Why in each gesture
 Such inexpressive graces? Why, but because
 They're native all, and will not be conceal'd.
 Else sure each charm betrays him, and becomes
 An advocate, whose silent eloquence
 Pleads 'gainst thy voice, and foils its tuneful
 power.

Traitor! was this the face which thy false tongue
 Prophan'd as vulgar? This such common beauty
 As the fair eye of Day beheld each hour
 In ev'ry clime he lighted? Base dissembler,
 This instant quit our realm,

E L F R I D A.

 O stay thee, Edgar,
 And once more hear me. At thy feet I fall
 As earnest, and distressed a suppliant,
 As e'er embrac'd the knees of Majesty.

E L F R I D A.

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O spare thy Country's guardian, Edgar, spare
Thy closest, surest friend. Let not one fault,
Cancel his thousand, thousand acts of faith.
Alas! I fall to vaineft repetition.
Grief, whelming grief drowns all my faculties
And leaves me nought but tears.

E D G A R.

Rise, rise, Elfrida.

E L F R I D A.

Shall he then live?

E D G A R.

He shall, he shall, my fair,
If so he quit the realm within the space
Our Sentence limited.

E L F R I D A.

O stop not there;
That sentence will be death to Athelwold.
Think, for thou know'st full well his gentle nature,
Can he support the rigour of this doom?
Can he, who liv'd but in thy gracious smiles,
Who'd pine, if chance those smiles a single hour
Were dealt him thriftily; Think, can he bear
The infamy of exile?

E D G A R.

Hear me, Athelwold.

Did I not show'r on thy much-favour'd head
 My thickest honors, and with gift so ready
 As out-run all request? Did I not hold thee,
 Still in such open confidence of friendship?
 Such love as—

A T H E L W O L D.

Sooner stab me than repeat it.

E D G A R.

Yet give me hearing. I repeat not this
 To taunt, or gall thee. On my soul thy worth
 Did o'ertop all those honors, and thy zeal
 Kept pace with my best love. Nor till this Deed—
 But such a deed! look there, look on that face.
 Thou know'st me, Athelwold, hast seen me gaze
 On a soft yielding fair one, till mine eye
 Shot flames. Perdition seize me, Earl,
 If I knew Love till now.

A T H E L W O L D.

I see it plainly,

Nor say I aught to lessen my Offence.
 No, here I kneel, Oh! cast but on my mis'ry
 One kind forgiving glance; this ready sword
 Shall expiate all.

E L F R I D A.

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E L F R I D A.

Ah! will you? must he die?

E D G A R.

No, stay thee, Athelwold, and sheath thy sword,
I never yet (save but this hour of rage)
Deem'd thee my subject. Thou wert still my friend,
And, injur'd as I am, thou still art such :
I do forego the word ; to banish thee
Or seal thy death, transcends a friend's just right.

E L F R I D A.

It does, it does, surpassing goodness. Virgins,
The king will pardon him. Wake each high note
Of praise, and gratitude, teach Edgar's name
To Harewood's furthest Echo. O my Sov'reign
What words can speak—

E D G A R.

Ah, check these transports, Lady,
Lest, if I see thee thus, my soul forget
Its fair resolve. I'll leave thee on the instant.
Yet first my lips must press this gentle hand,
And breathe one soft sigh of no common fervor.
Now on, my Lords—Fair wonder of thy sex,
Adieu. We'll strait unto our realm of Mercia.
Yet first, as was our purpose, thro' this forest.

We'll chace the nimble Roebuck; may the sport
More please us, than we hope. Earl Athelwold,
Thou too must join our train. Follow us straight.

[Exit Edgar, &c.]

A T H E L W O L D.

I do, my Liege. Elfrida, I have much
For thy lov'd ear, and have but one farewell
To tell it all—And yet——

E L F R I D A.

Ah loiter not,
It may enrage. Farewel. Be sure, take heed
I come not in your talk, avoid ev'n thinking,
Check ev'n the sighs of absence. Haste, my Earl,
Oh haste thee, as thou lov'st thy constant wife.

[Exit Athelwold.]

O R G A R, E L F R I D A, C H O R U S.

O R G A R.

Thy constant Wife! ah, stain of all thy race,
Degen'rate Girl! Henceforth be Orgar deem'd
Of soft, and dove-like temper, who could see
A child of his stoop to such vile abasement,
And yet forbore just wrath; forbore to draw
That blood she had defil'd from her mean veins.
But sure thou art not mine, some Elve or Faye

Did spirit away my babe, and by curst charms
Thee in her cradle plac'd. Nay hang not on me:
Dry, dry thy tears, they've done their office amply.
Edgar has pardon'd him. No, by my Earldom,
I cannot think of majesty thus meanly.
He'll yet avenge it: What if chance he should not?
That stops not me; I have a heart, an arm,
A sword can do me justice.

E L F R I D A.

Ah! my Lord,
Are you still merciless? Alas, I hop'd—

O R G A R.

What could'st thou hope, Elfrida? could'st thou
think
I e'er would pardon his vile perfidy,
Or thy ignoble softness?

E L F R I D A.

Dearest Father,
Frown not thus sternly on me. I would fain
Touch your relenting soul, fain win your heart
To fartherly forgiveness. For thro' life
I've oft had pleasing proof how that forgiveness
Stoop'd to my fond persuasion. But I fear
Persuasion now has left me. My sad thoughts
Are all on wing, all following Athelwold,
Like unseen ministring spirits:—Pardon, Sir,

That frown shall check me, I'll not mention him;
 I will but plead for my own weakness, plead
 For that soft sympathy of soul, which you
 Deem base and servile. Base perhaps it might be,
 Were I of bolder sex. But I, alas! —
 Ah pardon me, if Nature stamp'd me Woman;
 Gave me a heart soft, gentle, prone to pity,
 And very fearful. Fearful, sure with cause
 At this dread hour, when if one hapless word,
 One sigh break forth unbidden, it may wake
 The Monarch's rage—What has my phrenzy said?
 I've wander'd from my meaning. Dearest Virgins,
 My rash tongue more inflames him. O assist me,
 Ye are not thus oppress'd with inward horror:
 Kneel, plead, persuade, convince—

C H O R U S.

Alas, my mistress,
 What may a servant's accents do t'appease
 This furious Earl?

O R G A R.

Ye well may spare them: Maidens,
 Know my firm soul's resolv'd, and be my heart
 As base as Athelwold's, if it foregoes
 The honest resolution. Think what I,
 What Britain suffers from this Traytor's fraud:

Had Edgar took my daughter to his bed,
The British Line, which now is doom'd to sink
In vile subjection, had again assum'd
The pail of royalty, with half its power,
In time perchance the whole. But this false Saxon
Shall with his life repay me. Here I'll wait
His first return, and in his own domain
Give him fair combat. I have known the time
When this good arm had hardihood enough
For thrice his prowess. What is lost thro' age,
My just cause shall supply; and he shall fall
As did the traitor Oswald, whose bold tongue
Defam'd me to King Athelstan: To the ground
My sharp lance nail'd the caitiff.

[Exit Orgar.]

ELFRIDA, CHORUS.

ELFRIDA.

Think, my Lord,
Will Athelwold, will he enter those lists,
Where conquest would be parricide? Alas,
He hears me not. Go, thou obdurate Man.
A daughter's tears will but the more provoke thee.
I will not follow him. No, poor Elfrida!
All thou canst do is here to stand, and weep,
And feel that thou art wretched.

Dearest Mistress,
 Restrain this flood of tears, perhaps—

E L F R I D A.

Perhaps!

Ah! mock me not with hopes.

C H O R U S.

We do not mean it:
 For Hope, tho' 'tis pale Sorrow's only cordial,
 Has yet a dull and opiate quality;
 Enfeebling what it lulls. It suits not you,
 For, as we fear—

E L F R I D A.

Do you too fear? Alas!

I flatter'd my poor soul that all its Fears
 Were Grief's distemper'd coinage, that my Love
 Rais'd causeless apprehensions, and at length
 Edgar would quite forgive. I do bethink me,
 My joy broke forth too rashly. When they left us,
 His safety was not half secur'd; my pleading
 Was not half heard; I should have follow'd Edgar,
 Claim'd more full pardon, forc'd him to embrace
 My forrowing Lord.

C H O R U S.

We fear that sorrow more
 Than Edgar's rage. We fear his fallen Virtue.
 Self-condemnation works most strongly on him,
 Ev'n to Despondency. Nay, at his pardon,

No joy flush'd on his cheek ; we mark'd him well,
He shew'd no sign of welcome. No, he took it
As who should say, " to give me aught but Death
" Is a poor boon unwish'd and unaccepted."
Too much we fear he'll do some impious Act—

E L F R I D A.

What, on his life ? I thought I had explor'd
Each various face of danger : this escap'd me.
How miss'd I this ? It suits his courage highly ;
Suits too his fix'd remorse.—But yet he will not,
No, Athelwold, thou wilt not kill Elfrida.

C H O R U S.

O may his love preserve him : may these shades
Receive him soon in peace. To this blest end
You sure should strive to calm your Father's rage,
At least not suffer him, as now, retir'd
To brood o'er his revenge. For know, Elfrida,
Beneath the silent gloom of Solitude
Tho' Peace can sit and smile ; tho' meek Content
Can keep the chearful tenor of her soul,
Ev'n in the loneliest shades ; yet let not Wrath
Approach, let black Revenge keep far aloof
Or soon they flame to Madness.

E L F R I D A.

True, my Virgins ;
Attend me then : I'll try each winning art,
(Tho' ill such art becomes me) yet I'll aim it.—

Hark—whence that noise? I heard some hasty
footsteps.

C H O R U S.

O Heavens! 'tis Edwin.

E L F R I D A, E D W I N, C H O R U S.

E L F R I D A.

Edwin, ah! that look
Bespeaks too well the horror of thy errand.
Tell it me all.

E D W I N.

Alas!—

E L F R I D A.

Nay, do not pause.
Tell it me all. I think it will not kill me.
Repeat each circumstance. I'm ready, Edwin,
Ev'n for the worst.

E D W I N.

Then hear that worst, Elfrida.
Soon as the stag had left yon westward thicket,
The king dismiss'd his Lords, each sev'ral ways,
To their best sport, bidding Earl Athelwold,
Lord Ardulph, and myself, attend his person.
Thus parted from the rest, the Monarch pierc'd
A darkling dell, which open'd in a Lawn
Thick set with elm around. Suddenly here
He turn'd his steed, and cry'd, "This place befits
" Our purpose well."

E L F R I D A.

Purpose! what purpose, Edwin?
'Twas predetermin'd then, dissembling tyrant!
How could I trust, or hope—

E D W I N.

Yet give me hearing:
Thus with a grave composure, and calm eye
King Edgar spoke. Now hear me, Athelwold,
Thy king has pardon'd this thy trait'rous act;
From each committed sin 'gainst Majesty
Thou stand'st full franchis'd; yet there still remains
Somewhat to cancel more. As man to man,
As friend to friend, now, Athelwold, I call thee
Strait to defend thy life with thy good sword.
Nay, answer not; defend it gallantly.
If thy arm prosper, this my dying tongue
Shall pardon thee, and bless thee. If thou fall'st,
Thy parting breath must to my right resign
Elfrida's beauties. At the word, both drew,
Both fought, but Athelwold's was ill-play'd passion.
He aim'd his falchion at the Monarch's head,
Only to leave his own brave breast defenceless.
And the first stroke of Edgar's rapid sword
Pierc'd my dear master's heart. He fell to earth,
And falling, cry'd, "This wound atones for all.
"Edgar thus full aveng'd will pardon me,

“ And my true wife with chaste, connubial tears,
 “ Embalm my memory.” He smil’d, and dy’d.

E L F R I D A.

Nay, come not round me, Virgins, nor support me.
 I do not swoon, nor weep. I call not heav’n
 T’ avenge my wretchedness. I do not wish
 This tyrant’s hand may wither with cold palsies.
 No, I am very patient. Heav’n is just!
 And, when the measure of his crimes is full,
 Will bear its red right arm, and launce its lightnings.
 Till then, ye elements, rest: and thou, firm Earth,
 Ope not thy yawning jaws, but let this Monster
 Stalk his due time on thine affrighted surface.
 Yes; let him still go on; still execute
 His savage purposes, and daily make
 More widows weep, as I do. Foolish Eyes!
 Why flow ye thus unbidden? What have tears
 To do with grief like mine?

C H O R U S.

Help, help, my Sisters,
 To bear her to the castle.

ORGAR, ELFRIDA, EDWIN, CHORUS.

O R G A R.

As I pass
 Methought I heard a sound of loud lament,
 Elfrida, ha!

E L F R I D A.

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E L F R I D A.

Is not my father there ?

Withhold me not, I'll fall at his dear feet.

O Sir! behold you child thus lowly prostrate;
Avenge her wrongs, avenge your poor Elfrida,
Your helpless widow'd Daughter.

O R G A R.

Widow'd Daughter!

What is he slain?

E L F R I D A.

Inhospitably butcher'd,

The Tyrant's savage self—Stand you thus cool?

Where is the British spirit, where the fire
Of Belin's race?—O foolishness of grief!

Alas, I had forgot; had Edgar spar'd him,
That sword, to which my madness call'd for ven-
geance,

Ere long was meant to do the bloody deed,
And make the murder parricide. Have I
No friend to do me right?

O R G A R.

Thou hast, my Child;

I am thy friend, thy father. Trust my care.

Edwin, a word. Retire, my dearest Daughter:
Virgins, conduct her in.

K

E L F R I D A.

E L F R I D A.

My Father, No.

What do you do? I must not be withheld.
 I'll go to yon dire grove, and clasp my Husband,
 My murder'd Husband. Why restrain me, Sir?
 Can my sad eye dart fire thro' his cold breast,
 And light up life anew?

O R G A R.

Go in, my child,

And seek Tranquillity.

E L F R I D A.

And seek Tranquillity.

Ah! who will lead me to her darkling cell?
 I know her now, she is Death's pale-ey'd sister,
 Her Mansion is the murky charnel vault,
 Whence oft at midnight by the moon's pale gleam
 She sees the neighb'ring Sexton with his Spade
 Upturn the green-sward, delving the dank grave
 Of some love-stricken maid. Yes, lead me thither.

C H O R U S.

This way, my dearest Mistress.

E L F R I D A.

Hold, nay hold;

Croud not around me. Let me pause a while.
 Albina, thou alone shalt join my mis'ry;
 I've much to utter to thy friendly ear.

Lead on thou gentle maid ; thy single arm
Shall prop my trembling frame, thy single voice
Speak peace to my afflictions.

[Exit with the principal Virgin.]

ORGAR, EDWIN, SEMICHORUS.

ORGAR.

On your lives,
Virgins, let no disturbing step approach her.
Say, Edwin (for I guess 'twas you that brought
These tidings hither) where was royal Edgar,
When late you left him ?

EDWIN.

At my master's side,
Repentant of the stroke.

ORGAR.

Comes he not back
To Harewood ?

SEMICHORUS.

Heav'n forbid ! Elfrida's brain
Would madden at the sight.

ORGAR.

Mistake not, Virgins ;
I did not mean, at this distressful hour
The king should see my daughter.

SEMICHORUS.

No for pity,
Do not prophane this sabbath of her grief.
O be her sorrow sacred !

O R G A R.

Fear not, Virgins,

Her peace is my best care, and, to ensure it,
 I'll haste this instant by young Edwin's guidance
 To find the Monarch. Some four miles from
 Harewood
 Stands old Earl Egbert's castle, my fast friend.
 With him will I persuade the King to sojourn,
 'Till my child's grief abate, that too to speed
 Be it your business, Virgins. Watching ever
 Each happy interval, when your soft tongues
 May hint his praises, 'till by practice won
 She bear their fuller blazon. Elfrid's welfare
 Requires this friendly office at your hands;
 And Edgar's virtues bear such genuine lustre
 That Truth itself directs——

[Exit Orgar.]

S E M I C H O R U S.

As Truth directs,

So only shall we act. This day has shewn
 What dire effects await its violation.
 Strait is the road of Truth, and plain,
 And tho' across the sacred way
 Ten thousand false meanders stray,
 'Tis our's to walk direct,

ELFRIDA.

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And, with sage caution circumspect,
Pace slowly thro' the solemn scene.

[The principal Virgin returns.]

SEMICHORUS.

Has Orgar left the grove?

SEMICHORUS.

He has, my sister.

SEMICHORUS.

Then hear, and aid Elfrida's last resolve,
Who takes the only way stern Fate has left
To save her plighted faith for ever pure
To her dead Athelwold.

SEMICHORUS.

Forbid it, Patience;
Forbid it, that submissive Calm of soul,
Which teaches meek-ey'd Piety to smile
Beneath the scourge of Heav'n.

SEMICHORUS.

Ye need not fear it,
She means not self-destruction. Thanks to heav'n,
Huge and o'erbearing as her mis'ry is,
It cannot so oblit'rate from her breast

The written rule of Duty. Her pure Soul
Means, on the instant, to devote itself
To heav'n and holiness. Assist her strait,
Lest Edgar's presence, and her Father's rage,
Prevent the blest Intention. See, she comes.
Kneel on each side, devoutly kneel around her,
And breathe some pray'r in high and solemn strains,
That Angels from their thrones of light may hear,
And ratify her vow.

E L F R I D A, C H O R U S.

[*Elfrida kneels, and the Virgins divide into two Troops.*]

S E M I C H O R U S.

Hear, Angels, hear,
Hear from these nether thrones of Light;
And O! in golden characters record
Each firm, immutable, immortal word.
Then wing your solemn flight
Up to the heav'n of heav'ns, and there
Hang the conspicuous tablet high,
'Mid the dread records of Eternity.

E L F R I D A.

Hear first, that Athelwold's sad widow swears
To rear a hallow'd Convent o'er the place,
Where stream'd his blood; there will she weep
thro' Life
Immur'd with this chaste throng of Virgins; there
Each day shall six times hear her full-voic'd Choir

Chaunt the slow requiem o'er her martyr'd Lord;
There too, when Midnight lours with awful gloom,
She'll rise observant of the stated call
Of waking Grief, bear the dim livid taper
Along the winding Isles, and at the Altar
Kiss ev'ry pale shrine with her trembling lips,
Press the cold stone with her bent knee, and call
On fainted Athelwold.

S E M I C H O R U S.

Hear, Angels, hear,
Hear from these nether thrones of Light,
And O! in golden characters record
Each firm, immutable, immortal word;
Then wing your solemn flight
Up to the heav'n of heav'ns, and there
Hang the conspicuous tablet high,
'Mid the dread records of Eternity.

E L F R I D A.

Hear next, that Athelwold's sad widow swears
Never to violate the holy vow
She to his truth first plighted; swears to bear
The sober singleness of Widowhood
To her cold grave. If from this chaste resolve
She ev'n in thought should swerve, if gaudy pomp,
Or flatt'ring greatness e'er should tempt one wish
To stray beyond this purpose, may that heav'n,

Which hears this vow, punish its violation
As heav'nly justice ought.

CHORUS.

Hear, Angels, hear,
Hear from these nether thrones of light,
And O! in golden characters record
Each firm, immutable, immortal word.
Then wing your solemn flight
Up to the heav'n of heav'ns, and there
Hang the conspicuous tablet high,
'Mid the dread records of Eternity.

F I N I S.



